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Why do medical students volunteer to train simulated patients? A qualitative evaluation of motivations and incentives

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Why do medical students volunteer to train simulated patients? A qualitative evaluation of motivations and incentives

Abstract

The willingness to actively volunteer is an expected trait of medical students. Their compliance to participate in teaching and learning interventions is well described in the medical education literature. The purpose of this investigation is to determine whether medical students' motivations to volunteer are congruent with motivational drives of other community members. We recruited eighteen (18) medical students, who contributed to the 2010 patient volunteer training as interview partners. One focus of their involvement was to develop feedback skills in newly recruited simulated patients. Ten (10) of these students participated in our audio-recorded focus group interviews. A thematic analysis of the transcripts revealed three main themes emerging from the data. The main motives for participating are primarily reciprocity, gaining an additional opportunity for own skill development and the associated social interaction with simulated patients and peers. The supply of food and refreshments constituted a strong incentive, whilst unsuitable timing of the training session presented the major barrier. Medical students are motivated to be involved in the training of simulated patients provided timetabling of the activity recognises their needs and refreshments are provided.

Keywords

simulated, train, volunteer, incentives, students, motivations, medical, do, why, evaluation, qualitative, patients

Disciplines

Medicine and Health Sciences | Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Why do Medical Students Volunteer to Train Simulated Patients? A Qualitative Evaluation of Motivations and Incentives

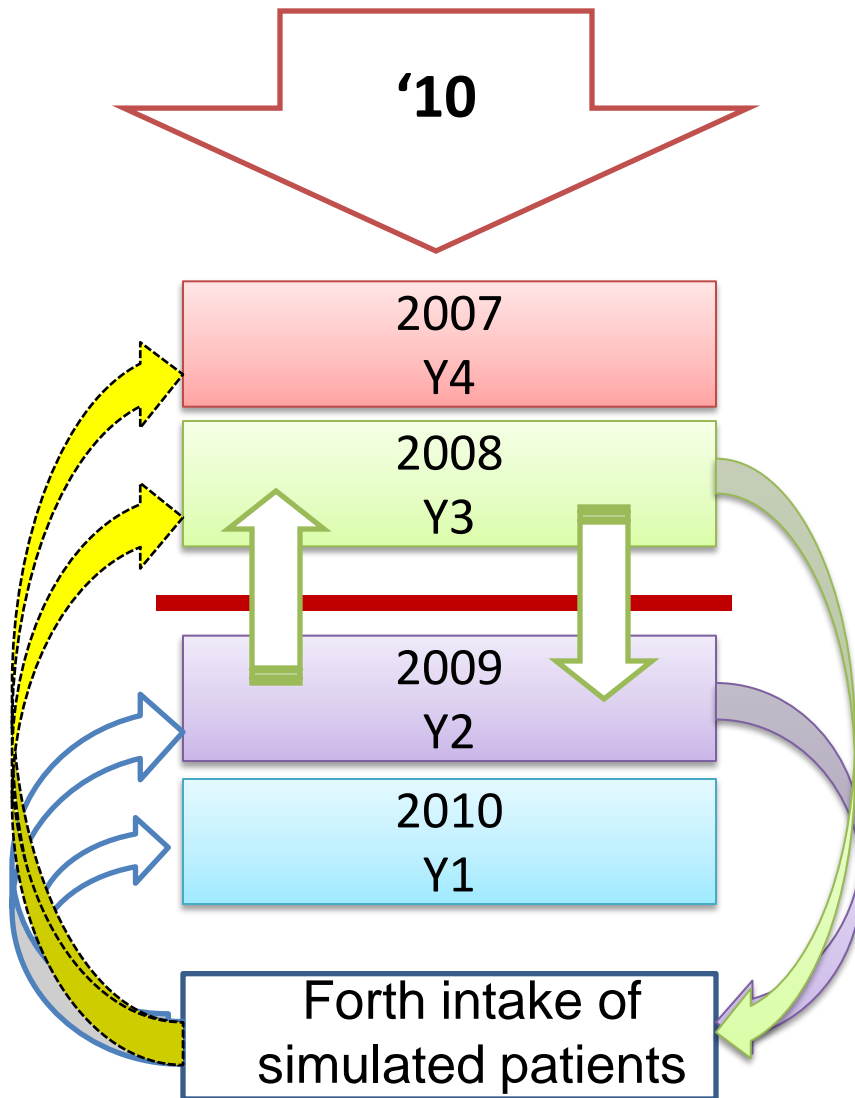
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General Information

- The Graduate School of Medicine (GSM) runs a four year graduate-entry MBBS programme.
- Operates on 2 campuses, Wollongong (WG) and Shoalhaven (SH), which are about 90 kms apart.
- Each campus has a Patient Volunteer Coordinator (PVC) who recruits and trains local volunteers as Simulated Patients (SPs).
- The students are allocated to one of the campuses (2/3 in WG and about 1/3 in SH).

2010



- GSM's first year of full operations.
- Fourth intake of patient volunteers for SP training.
- First time students were involved in the training.
- Reciprocity between students and SPs and between Y2 and Y3 students emerged.

Workshop Evaluations 2010

“Opportunity to help volunteer patients who provide us with so much help and practice throughout the year.”

“The strength of the volunteers totally benefits our learning in clinical skills.”

“To gain more confidence in history taking and to help the new patient volunteers learn.”

“Good, easy, low stress review of history taking, helpful learning session for volunteers.”

“Giving something back to the school.”

Method

- 18 students who contributed to the SP training in 2010 were invited to the focus groups.
- 2 Focus group dates in WG.
- 1 focus group date in SH.
- 10 students participated in the focus groups.
- Project addition under Doctor-PESt ethics approval.

Motivations to Volunteer

Career Development

“ ... any practise that you can get at any point is good.”

“... it could help with the competency.”

Reciprocity

“ ... I really like having patient volunteers to come and help us out and I feel this was a good way to help them out.

Social interaction

“I think part of the success of the training was the sort of relaxed, encouraging atmosphere ... before we actually started we came and chatted with them [the volunteers]”.

Understanding

“So I guess you can kind of appreciate how patient volunteers develop from wanting to help and getting involved to being able to be very constructive with their feedback.

Values

“ These patients are here all the time and they are a great resource for us so it's nice to give back.”

Motivations to and Functions of Volunteering

Volunteer Motivation

Inventory (VMI)

- Career Development
- Protective
- Reactivity
- Reciprocity
- Recognition
- Self-esteem
- Social
- Social interaction
- Understanding
- Values

(Esmond & Dunlop, 2004)

Volunteer Function

Inventory (VFI)

- Career
- Esteem / Enhancement
- Protective
- Social
- Understanding
- Values

(Clary et al., 1998 and 1992)

Incentives

Temporal Suitability:

Away from busy times like

- tutorials
- placements
- exams,...

“I think that maybe we didn’t get as many people because a few people were anxious about exams and stuff”

Catering :

Catering is a must.

Incentive increases the more sophisticated the catering promises to be:

“... at the hospital we get lots of food too, you’ve got to compete, there rounds in the morning.”

How does this compare?

- Medical students' motivations to participate in volunteer activities are higher than in the general population and in other university students (Switzer et al, 1999).
- GSM students' motivations – career, understanding, values - appear to match the top three ranked motivation in Switzer et al. (Switzer et al, 1999).
- Special groups of volunteers may not produce clear dimensions on the VFI scale (Langridge & Ryan, 2002).
- A gender difference exists in motives to volunteer (Fletcher & Major, 2004; Switzer et al, 1999).

What have we learnt?

- Students are a valuable resource to training simulated patients.
- Medical students motivation to volunteer is high.
- Recognizing their motives for volunteering helps with recruitments.
- Providing appropriate incentives is crucial to engage sufficient numbers.

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